

Testimony in Favor of House Bill No. 6374

AN ACT CONCERNING SEXUAL MISCONDUCT ON COLLEGE CAMPUSES.

Submitted to the Connecticut General Assembly's Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee

Submit to: HEDtestimony@cga.ct.gov

Dear honorable Co-Chairs Senator Haskell, Rep. Elliott, my state senator Mr. Derek Slap, and distinguished Members of the Higher Education Committee and Employment Advancement Committee:

From: Mitchel Austin Kvedar, Co-Director of Sunrise Connecticut, State Affairs Coordinator of UConn Undergraduate Student Government

My name is Mitchel Kvedar, I am the Co-Director of the Sunrise Movement CT, and the UConn student tasked with all things "State Affairs" on behalf of the UConn Undergraduate Student Government. I am a UConn student studying political science/environmental studies and am from Burlington CT. I am testifying in favor of HB 6374.

Good morning, and thank you for allowing me this opportunity to speak in regards to something myself and many students are passionate about. This topic holds a special place in my heart for many reasons.

To start, sexual assault, and misconduct on college campuses is an epidemic of its own in our modern times – and it always has been. Luckily more and more light is being shed on the issue as people slowly feel more comfortable in our culture in coming out and reporting what has happened to them. It is incredibly important we continue to foster this inclusive and welcoming space in our state, and gather as much data as possible around such. That is why the campus climate survey, with a rate of every two years would stand to be so beneficial. It provides an avenue to tell their stories, anonymously, so that CT as a whole, and individual universities can better understand, and then solve the problem, providing support for their students in need. It would provide a safe, confidential platform, and the data would be helpful in further efforts to protect students down the line.

Speaking on behalf of various students from both my time as an Eastern Connecticut State University student prior to my transfer, and as a current UConn Husky, the backing for greater means of support for victims of sexual misconduct is huge. I know of many who unfortunately cannot be here today that wish to voice their support for the bill.

On a deeply personal note, I thought long and hard on what I wished to include in regards to my intimate feelings on this matter and how to address such. I decided that I thought that it would be something that potential opponents of this bill might wish, or need to hear. I feel very connected to this topic and feel quite passionately. As a heterosexual male, my eyes have been opened up over the years to the disgusting reality of the number of women that have gone through sexual abuse, misconduct, or whatever you may call it. For my purposes I will continue to use the word "misconduct" despite feeling such a word to be lackluster no matter the scenario that may have occurred.

We all see the statistic that 1 in 5 women in the United States have been sexually assaulted ([NISVS 2010 Summary Report](#)), with nearly 1 in 4 college women having been involved with sexual misconduct ([Campus Climate Survey on Sexual Assault and Misconduct](#)). In CT alone, through data reported through the Clery Act, it showed that there have been 436 instances of sexual violence, stalking, and domestic

violence in 2018. Yet this must be an incredibly low number as estimates show that over 90% of cases go unreported due to a number of things. I firmly believe such is criminally underreported, just through my own experiences. At times, all of this feels like just a number - and if you don't personally know of people affected it can be hard to put into perspective.

Over the years, I have had the pleasure of getting to know intimately and deeply many courageous women in my life, all of which I have come to love in one way or another, and deeply care for. They are what has made me so passionate about this bill, and about the struggles that survivors go through. I feel I owe it to all of them, and my peers who have felt that they cannot report their abusers or cannot receive adequate help, who struggle day in and day out with lasting mental health and physical health consequences, to be an ally in this fight. As a young 21 year old college male, 87% of my partners have undergone very serious sexual misconduct in their lifetimes from past partners and strangers alike— and that was only gleaned from very intimate and personal conversations with those that I love/loved. I suspect that such a number is similar with women my age across our state. Survivors are not people looking to seek attention, or people looking to harm others in the vast majority of cases. Survivors are more likely to hide such, and rather not want the attention. These are real people that have undergone abuse, and struggle with it, day in and day out.

I want all of you to imagine for a moment, sitting down with someone you love, perhaps a partner, a friend you love, a sibling, or a child of yours. Imagine hearing any of the following – of a past sexual misconduct. These are in vague detail just some of the very real things I have unfortunately heard, and seen, through many teary, shaky, devastatingly difficult conversations. Imagine being told that they have panic attacks when a stranger asks a question, and are forever weary of a gender. Imagine being told that they were once kidnapped, and their parents don't even believe them. Imagine being photographed without consent, and are worried about future blackmail. Imagine your partner waking up every 20 minutes to a reoccurring dream of their abuser years after, unable to ever get a normal night's sleep. Imagine being told that a sibling had abused them when they were a child. Imagine being told that they thought that it was normal, and it wasn't until they were with a new partner did they realize the reality of what they went through. Imagine being told that because of the lack of sex ed, and strong ties to a religion they believed they were meant to be subservient to their partner – and their partner took advantage of such, that “no” wasn't an answer when you are dating someone. Imagine being told that they don't feel anything at all anymore and that they don't want to be here any longer because of what has happened to them. Imagine waking up next to your partner and seeing an ex of theirs being hacked inside their phone trying to see who they are talking to, with said ex repeatedly showing up on your campus or house. Imagine being told that they don't know how to love because all they have ever known is abuse. Imagine being told as a kid that someone in the neighborhood molested you. Imagine any of this, because it's real and it happens to people you love, if you know of it or not.

People often are told by others that they are not believed or that they should just get over it. As if it was that easy. Nearly all of my past partners had past trauma associated with sexual misconduct, that still deeply affects them to this day. For me, partners that haven't been abused is a rarity. These are people that are students, here in our college system that deserve so much better. Most of which, had never reported their case in any official capacity. Some of which have the scars to prove it, or various other health issues. Many survivors experience various triggers, that cause day to day panic attacks. For these people it's not for attention, it's a desperate cry for help, and when these people do must up the courage

to speak up to a partner, and eventually further, they should be afforded every ability and be protected. Period. A simple start to a healing process would be to have their experiences put into a database of statistics, to know they might help someone else through reporting confidentially. Many women and survivors are scared to do so for many reasons, be it facing ridicule, getting someone in trouble, or not being believed.

For those of you in the room that may worry about false reporting and such. I debated if I was to include this information, as it is deeply personal, but decided it was important to understand the whole of my perspective. A very close friend of mine was once threatened with a title 9 charge, restraining order, stalking charge, etc from a former partner and her roommates, who made up a stalking story. Yet, with the university police he was able to clear things up and provided evidence that proved such an instance never occurred. No charges were ever filed, and while it was a scary experience, especially as a fellow political science major – he is the staunchest supporter of believing survivors and this here bill, and wanted that to be known. If anyone truly believes in helping others, allowing an avenue to confidentially report, and make survivors live more comfortably should be welcomed, even from the minority that have been falsely accused. In reality, such is a very rare occurrence, and in the end far more people are affected by real stories of sexual misconduct than those that may not be accurate. In all reality, **official figures suggest** that the number of rapes/sexual assaults that are not reported/prosecuted far outweighs the number of men convicted due to false cases. In any regard, this bill is regarding anonymous collecting of data, and would not contribute to false reporting or any of such concerns that are normally brought up.

I have always felt grateful of those women who chose to share their deeply personal stories with me, and I do doubt that most survivors even share their stories with their partners – so how can we expect them to report to a system without a guarantee of protection. For those who doubt my claims, of stories, or of most women I have gotten to know personally, I have long been told that I should be a counselor, and for quite some time I had thought that was to be my career of choice as people have always identified myself as someone they feel safe with (something I am very honored with). I decided against being a counselor, as I wouldn't be able to separate work life, and people's issues from my own life when I returned home. I think such, empathy enabled me to be an ally for these young women, and not every partner is as much an ally as he or she should be. Instead, I chose the political field, as I realized that was where I could do the most potential good, for the most people. Which is exactly what all of you have the opportunity to do, right here and now, to help many people with their life journey's, and make the process of reporting easier, and change many lives.

The two year climate survey is critical as opposed to the four-year survey for many reasons. It would help universities be able to effectively capture all students that attend. With a four-year survey you have the potential to miss out on those that may transfer out of the Connecticut system (perhaps due to a sexual misconduct that prompts transferring), and those that are pursuing two-year associate degrees. Additionally, should someone enter the system and be surveyed as a freshman, they would not be surveyed for the next three years of their time, which is both a lot of data missed, and stories lost. Any good experiment/data collection would see that such an oversight is not possible. The argument that the cost would be too great, is an argument for providing less avenues for students to report their stories and I personally believe when the cost of such, in learning about the epidemic that is sexual misconduct, is very worth it. Regardless the estimated cost according to the Harvard Kennedy School is around only \$3,000. This estimated cost includes incentives and hiring those to analyze their results.

I implore this committee, to vote favorably out of committee as soon as possible. I know that so many people I love and care about would benefit greatly from such. It is impossible to describe accurately the pain I have seen in other's eyes, and if the legislature could ease just any of that pain with support from testimonies such as this, I know various people will sleep a little easier with this bill implemented. Both from mental health relief in regard to being able to "do something" and report in some capacity – as well as aid future generations with the results the surveys would inevitably help in crafting future policies to address the epidemic we face.

Thank you humbly for your time,

My best,

Mitchel Kvedar

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